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AN ACCIDENTAL ADVANCE? SOUTH AFRICA'S 2009 ELECTIONS

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Democratic advances are often achieved in spite of the politicians who trigger them. Thus South Africa's April 2009 parliamentary and provincial elections, despite a largely unedifying campaign that culminated in the naming of a president who only days before had dodged having to defend himself in court against corruption charges, may yet prove an important democratic breakthrough.

In the April 22 balloting, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) won 66 percent of the vote and 264 seats in the 400-seat National Assembly—down 15 seats from 2004, and the party's first-ever decline in vote share. The Democratic Alliance (DA), the official opposition party, won 16.7 percent of the vote and 67 seats. The Congress of the People (COPE), the ANC splinter party formed in the fall of 2008, won 7.4 percent and 30 seats, and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) won 4.6 percent and 18 seats. The remaining seats were allotted to nine smaller parties, each with less than 1 percent of the vote. (South Africa has a closed-list proportional-representation system that awards seats to any party able to win a quarter of one percent of the vote.) Two weeks after the polling, parliament elected ANC leader Jacob Zuma as president of the republic.

If the election does become a turning point, it will be so not because high-minded leaders sought to deepen democracy, but because competition for power and influence opened new democratic avenues. This is hardly a uniquely South African development. Dankwart Rustow's pioneering study of democratic transitions argued that democracy is born not when leaders wish it, but when conflicts resolve themselves in ways that make it the most pragmatic option.¹ This holds not just for the birth

of democracy but also for the ways in which it becomes broader, deeper, and more enduring.

Understanding the prospects for and threats to democracy in South Africa that stem from the election therefore requires us to look beyond the proclivities of the politicians embroiled in power struggles to the processes that these political battles may be creating and influencing. Before discussing how the election may reshape politics, however, it is necessary to place it in context.

If we understand democracy purely as a set of “negative” freedoms that protect individuals from arbitrary government power, South Africa’s democracy has done much better than expected since its inception in 1994.² Overall, civil liberties have been respected,³ and the country’s 1996 constitution is enforced by a constitutional court that has periodically overturned legislation and rejected government decisions. A vigorous national debate provides a platform for divergent voices, many of them highly critical of the government.

The country’s racial divisions ensure that predominantly black political officeholders must contend with a white minority that is deeply skeptical of majority government, well-resourced, and well-connected, and thus able to express its misgivings whenever government performance is seen to be lacking—which is almost always. Regular national, provincial, and local elections have produced results that are largely accepted as an accurate reflection of the voters’ will. The relative ease with which society has moved from an authoritarian racial oligarchy to a functioning democracy remains remarkable, even though it is often taken for granted, particularly by many in the white minority.

But if we see democracy also as positive liberty—as a regime of popular sovereignty in which law and policy are meant, as far as practicable, to reflect the will of an actively participating citizenry—then progress is far more modest. Since 1994, elections have been marked by vigorous campaigning, much public debate, and, until this year, the election of the ruling ANC with an ever-increasing share of the vote (see Table on page 113). By 2004, the ANC also controlled all nine provincial legislatures and all but one of the local councils in metropolitan areas. The ANC has for almost a century represented the majority identity in the country and has thus been assured of growing support.⁴

Electoral contestation within the ANC has also been limited. While the party’s constitution provides for regular contested elections at all levels, its political culture—which stems from its long period as an outlawed resistance movement—has deterred internal competition, branding those who vie for office as selfish and overambitious. Until late 2007, there were some internal ANC elections, but the party leadership was for the most part chosen by conclaves of party elders.

These realities contributed to a conspicuous lack of government accountability and responsiveness. Political leaders, confident that they

would lead and govern for as long as they wished, felt no great pressure to account to the electorate and respond to its concerns. Elections, of course, are not the only source of democratic accountability. The country's racial dynamics, as well as a diversified economy that made resources available to independent citizens' organizations, ensured far greater accountability than we might expect if we focused solely on election results.⁵ But the seemingly inevitable electoral arithmetic limited the impact of attempts to hold government to account and also allowed the government to keep the vast majority of poorer citizens at arm's length.

The result was evident in both the government's style and performance. The administration of President Thabo Mbeki, who took office in 1999, relied heavily on centralized decision making that placed a premium on technical expertise rather than the concerns of the electorate. While this initially appeared to offer a more managerial and more efficient style of government, by 2007 it had become clear that the administration's efficiency was largely illusory, as illustrated by a much-discussed electricity crisis, continued high crime levels, and only mixed success in addressing poverty despite the devotion of substantial resources to this task.⁶ The gulf between what policy makers felt was needed and what a welter of research evidence revealed about preferences and dynamics among the poor hurt the government's antipoverty policies.⁷ In short, government remained largely insulated from the need to respond to the people and take action on their concerns; thus the depth and breadth of democracy and government effectiveness remained weak.

The Palace Rebellion

Mbeki's government was also largely insulated from his own party, a reality that became apparent in December 2007, when he failed to win re-election for a third term as ANC president, losing to the party's deputy president, Jacob Zuma. Mbeki loyalists likewise lost the contests for every other senior ANC leadership post that year. This was the first time that an incumbent president had been defeated in an ANC election since 1949, and it signaled to its leaders that they could no longer rely on party activists to re-elect them. Because ANC leaders can no longer assume victory, they are now more likely to feel accountable to the rest of the party.

Within a few months of the Mbeki camp's losing control, the ANC was transformed from a party in which contested elections were seen as a symptom of indiscipline to one in which all posts were hotly contested. An ethos that might have been appropriate for a movement fighting racial domination has proven inadequate to managing competition among ambitious politicians hoping to secure status and privilege. Moreover, the coalition that backed Zuma was diverse and divided, held together

by little more than a common desire to defeat Mbeki. Since that task has now been accomplished, the divisions have grown and, if not managed effectively, could prompt another split in the ANC.

But while the pressures forcing ANC leaders to respond to party members (who constitute only a fraction of its voters) have increased since the ANC election, the need to show the same concern for voters has not, as the ruling party faced no threat at the polls. On the contrary, the politics of 2008 were dominated by the preoccupations of politicians, not the concerns of voters. To take but one example, the ruling party disbanded a special investigative unit that is deeply unpopular among ANC politicians without consulting a public worried about high crime rates. While the constitution mandates that the public must be consulted on legislation through parliamentary hearings, ANC legislators made it clear before the first hearings that they would be voting to abolish the unit, signaling to the people that their opinion on this issue was irrelevant.⁸

Still, as the election approached, there were indications that the ANC would need to pay more attention to the electorate than had been the case in previous campaigns. The ANC leadership's call for Mbeki to step down as party president led to the formation of COPE—the first serious competition that the ANC has faced for its traditional voter base. At the same time, press reports revealed that internal ANC opinion polls showed a significant drop in public support—probably a reflection of voter disenchantment with a politics which seemed to ignore their concerns entirely. The ANC also faced a challenge in the Western Cape from the DA, which seemed set to benefit from a shift away from the ANC by many of the province's voters. (The DA is a union of the Democratic Party—the official opposition since the 1990s and a descendant of earlier white progressive parties, including the party to which Helen Suzman belonged—and a section of the New National Party.)

All this suggested that 2009 could be the first election in which the ANC vote would shrink. The prospect of greater competition, along with a sustained voter-registration campaign mounted by nongovernmental organizations, heightened interest in the election in a society whose levels of electoral participation were already high—especially for a country where election results are not in doubt. In all, some three-million new voters registered.⁹ The election, South Africa's fourth since it became a democracy, was thus widely thought to be the most important since the first universal-franchise ballot in 1994. To what extent did the result vindicate these expectations?

There is a certain irony about the election. While it may well have broken the mold of electoral politics, it did so not because voters behaved differently but because they acted in much the same way as they had for the past decade and a half.

The ANC did lose some ground. Its share of the national vote dropped

by almost 4 points, a result that deprived it of the two-thirds majority—and thus the right to change the constitution at will—that it had enjoyed since 2004. This seemingly modest loss in support would have been far greater had it not been for an outcome unlikely to be repeated: The ANC scored a decisive victory (63 percent) in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province at the expense of the IFP, which in 1994 had won a majority there but gained only 22.4 percent of the province's vote this time around. Some analyses attributed the ANC's enormous gains to Zuma's being a Zulu who shared an ethnic identity with most KZN voters. While Zuma's embrace of Zulu tradition surely helped, his ability to break the link between the IFP and traditional Zulu leaders, which previously had ensured it much of the rural vote, may have been decisive.

Regardless, the effect was to gain the ANC hundreds of thousands of votes—one analysis estimates that without the swing in KZN, the ANC's national vote would have dipped below 60 percent.¹⁰ Although this figure exaggerates the likely decline, the ANC did lose ground in every other province. Thus there was a far more decisive move away from the ruling party than the national poll numbers suggest.

The DA did even better than expected in the Western Cape—it won a narrow absolute majority, better than the plurality that most had predicted. Together with an enhanced turnout of its traditional supporters elsewhere in the country, this gave the DA a 5-point increase in its national vote share.

Both COPE leaders and media commentators had believed that the new party's roots in the ANC—most COPE leaders had been ruling-party politicians (former defense minister Mosiuoa Lekota and former premier of Gauteng province Mbhazima Shilowa, for example)—would enable it to supplant the DA as the official opposition. With COPE winning only 7.4 percent of the vote, however, these expectations were disappointed. Smaller parties, representing an array of racial, religious, and ethnic constituencies, all lost ground, as their supporters defected to the DA and COPE in the hope of strengthening opposition to the ANC.

One of the more remarkable features of the campaign was something that did *not* occur—significant election-related violence. The heightened competition did spark some violence, including at least two deaths in KZN, and there were reports of political intolerance and coercion, ranging from attempts to exchange public services for votes to attempts to deprive parties of meeting venues. Some traditional leaders allegedly told their subjects to vote for specific parties. Overall, however, levels of violence and intolerance were much lower than had been feared.¹¹ Moreover, since the 1994 elections—when the country was divided into “no-go areas,” party-dominated zones that were hostile to campaigning by rivals—it has become progressively easier for the parties to campaign on one another's territory.

It is unclear whether this improvement was due to enhanced toler-

TABLE—PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION RESULTS, 1994–2009

PARTY	2009		2004		1999		1994	
	% OF VOTE	SEATS	% OF VOTE	SEATS	% OF VOTE	SEATS	% OF VOTE	SEATS
ANC	65.9	264	69.7	279	66.4	266	62.6	252
DA ¹	16.7	67	12.4	50	9.6	38	1.7	7
COPE	7.4	30	-	-	-	-	-	-
IFP	4.6	18	7.0	28	8.6	34	10.5	43
Independent Democrats	0.9	4	1.7	7	-	-	-	-
United Democratic Movement	0.8	4	2.3	9	3.4	14	-	-
Freedom Front Plus ²	0.8	4	0.9	4	0.8	3	2.2	9
African Christian Democratic Party	0.8	3	1.6	7	1.4	6	0.5	2
United Christian Democratic Party	0.4	2	0.8	3	0.8	3	-	-
Pan Africanist Congress of Azania	0.3	1	0.7	3	0.7	3	1.2	5
Minority Front	0.2	1	0.4	2	0.3	1	-	-
Azanian People's Organisation	0.2	1	0.3	1	0.2	1	-	-
African People's Convention	0.2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
New National Party ³	-	-	1.7	7	6.9	28	20.4	82
Federal Alliance	-	-	-	-	0.5	2	-	-
Afrikaner Eenheids Beweging	-	-	-	-	0.3	1	-	-

Notes:

1. Contested as the Democratic Party in 1999 and 1994.
2. Contested as Freedom Front in 1999 and 1994.
3. Contested as the National Party in 1994.

ance or simply the lack of incentive for parties to campaign outside their strongholds. Residential segregation was a key feature of apartheid, and elements of past settlement patterns remain today. Thus there is often a strong coincidence between identity and geography, which tends to determine where a party will dominate: the ANC in urban townships where the black poor live, the DA in the suburbs where most residents are racial minorities, and the IFP in the rural areas of KZN in which traditional leaders dominate. In many cases, local party leaderships have entrenched themselves and muscled out their challengers.¹² As a result, parties (particularly larger ones) have focused on mobilizing their own supporters rather than on competing for votes in their rivals' areas. Elections were free and fair, but largely uncompetitive.

The 2009 election challenged this pattern. The emergence of the

breakaway COPE meant that for the first time there was serious competition for the votes of ANC supporters. At the same time, in KZN the ANC targeted the rural areas traditionally dominated by the IFP, while the latter tried to win support in the urban areas where the ANC has held sway. And in the Western Cape, the DA rallied voters who had backed the ANC in the previous election.

This posed a significant risk of violence and the possibility that local party leaderships would force their opponents out. As the contenders arguably had never experienced vigorous electoral competition, there was no guarantee that they would allow opponents to campaign in their territory. While national party leaderships urged tolerance and signed a code of conduct, there was a real danger that local leaderships would not feel bound by these national commitments. The relatively low levels of intolerance and violence in 2009 therefore represented an important breakthrough, since they suggest that society has a more robust capacity to cope with enhanced electoral competition than the history just sketched would suggest.

The Power of Identity

Electoral choices in South Africa are shaped by identities: Voters across the spectrum tend to remain loyal to parties that represent their identity group, defined by a complex mix of race, language, and culture. Although the 2009 election was the most competitive in the country's history, the shifts in voter sentiment were far from a break with the past. The outcome was not a product of voters' abandoning identity voting. On the contrary, the swings occurred because identity voting was given new expression.

Evidence suggests that most ANC voters who told pollsters that they would bolt the party in fact stayed with it. Identity voting means that party loyalties are particularly strong, so many voters who swear months ahead of time that they will stay at home or switch parties instead return to their political base by election day. Polls taken months before the ballot may be interesting measures of trust in political leadership, but they are weak predictors of voting patterns.

One reason that the ANC lost support was the feeling of some voters that their ANC identity was best expressed through COPE. Most of the new party's vote seems to have been gleaned from ANC supporters upset by Mbeki's removal or dismayed at Zuma's perceived threat to traditional ANC values (in addition to the corruption charges against him, he had stood trial for rape, which alienated some voters despite his acquittal). Still loyal to the roots of the ANC, these defectors believed that by voting against the party's new leadership they were supporting its traditional values.

Given the strength of party loyalties, then, it seems inevitable that

if any party ever bests the ANC at the polls, that party will prove to have been one that emerged from within ANC ranks and managed to convince most ANC voters that it represented the ethos and tradition of the movement better than did the ANC itself. That is why COPE's formation prompted such excitement among both opposition parties and commentators—they sensed that the promised split in the ANC support base had arrived.

That judgment was premature. COPE's leaders may have emerged from within the ANC, but they were not senior enough to make the case to voters that they were representing ANC tradition rather than breaking with it. The COPE leadership was composed almost entirely of politicians who had fought apartheid from within the country and had gravitated to the ANC from rival resistance movements or from the trade unions. None of the senior exiled or jailed ANC figures joined the new party, in some cases despite intense antipathy to Zuma and his supporters. COPE, then, was directed not by seasoned ANC veterans but by more recent leaders whose authenticity could be questioned. The party also blundered in its choice of Bishop Mvume Dandala—a respected clergyman, but one with no history of ANC activism—as its presidential candidate.

The DA, with its victory in the Western Cape and its improved performance in some other provinces, also drew voters away from the ANC. But this too stemmed from the tenacity of traditional political identities. A chief reason for the DA's success was that many of the “coloured” voters in the Western Cape who had voted ANC in 2004 switched back to the DA.¹³ They did so in response to the province's ANC leadership, which they felt gave priority to the interests of black Africans and which they found culturally and politically foreign. Disillusioned, they concluded that the ANC was not a party for people like them, and they returned to the opposition. Moreover, the DA's supporters among racial minorities turned out in droves, hoping to keep a Zuma-led ANC from winning two-thirds of the vote. This boosted the DA's vote share, even in provinces that it lost. The DA remains a home for minority identities. It reached out to black African voters in this campaign, but without noticeable success.

The drop in support for smaller parties was not a decisive endorsement of a three-party system. Many of these parties' supporters switched to the DA or COPE because they were convinced by the argument that voting for these parties was more likely to strengthen the opposition than their traditional vote (even though voting for smaller parties does little to weaken the opposition in South Africa's PR system). Again, a key factor was identity-based antipathy toward the new ANC leadership. But the result was not to wipe out smaller parties—they simply won fewer seats. As long as the electoral system remains as it is, smaller parties will remain viable because they will offer a vehicle for particular identities to enjoy a voice in parliament.

Finally, the dramatic swing away from the IFP was also identity based. Some voters probably did vote ANC because Zuma is Zulu. Just as important, however, are voters' ties to traditional institutions—the more closely connected the voters are to the Zulu chieftaincy, the more likely they are to vote IFP. The party has lost votes in each successive election because voters drift from it to the ANC as they reduce their ties to the rural areas. It follows that KZN voters will desert the IFP if their chief changes sides or if they sense that the power of traditional leaders is waning. Both factors played a role in the 2009 contest.

The April election did not signal that South Africans are beginning to abandon identity politics in favor of voting their economic interests. Nor is there any reason why such a change would enrich democracy. Although academic commentators in South Africa tend to see identity voting as a symptom of political primitivism, identity politics plays a role in well-established democracies as well. There are numerous regional and religious parties across Western Europe, for example, and even in countries where parties do not overtly represent identities, voters may nonetheless choose their party allegiance based on identity—"red" and "blue" states in the United States, for instance, or Scotland's dependable support for Labour and southern England's backing for Conservatives—whatever the state of the economy or the perceived performance of the party.

That South Africans continue to vote their identities does not make them abnormal or backward; rather, it places them firmly in the democratic mainstream. What is worth noting about the 2009 elections, however, is the possibility that, by casting its votes based on the same criteria as before, the electorate may have opened up previously stifled democratic potential.

The Election and Democracy

Because the swing away from the ANC was not decisive enough to cause the party great alarm, the decline in its vote will not automatically induce ANC leaders to be more accountable and responsive to voters. Its reduced share of the vote was still higher than the 63 percent that it won in 1994's founding election. Politicians wishing to see the result as an ANC victory can cite most media observers in their support. Much of the reportage and commentary during the campaign had created the expectation that the ANC would lose far more ground than it actually did. Accordingly, instead of characterizing the outcome as a setback for the ruling party, the media dubbed it a triumph.¹⁴

The ANC's first-ever electoral retreat was thus portrayed as an advance, and the first sign that the ruling party was losing touch with some voters was instead presented as a confirmation of its near-organic connection with the electorate. Similarly, some ANC strategists keep com-

paring the result not to the previous election but to the outcome predicted by its early polls. Furthermore, neither the media commentary nor the ANC's understanding of the election takes into account that, months before the election, many voters said that they would not vote for the ANC but did so in the end. These voters were not expressing allegiance to the current leadership; they were expressing loyalty to the party in spite of that leadership.

It is therefore not clear that the ANC will view the results as a sign that it needs to take voters more seriously. Already there are indications that the warning is going unheeded. Like the Mbeki administration, the first Zuma cabinet is hoping to achieve more efficient government not by strengthening citizens' ability to hold it to account, but through central planning and coordination, to be exercised through a planning commission and a ministry for monitoring and evaluation, both located in the presidency.

While shifts in voting trends were far less dramatic than expected, the outcome may nonetheless prove crucial to the country's immediate economic and political future. Although COPE failed to meet its own exaggerated expectations, it will be a presence in both the National Assembly, with its 30 seats, and the provincial parliaments. (It won at least 4 seats in five of the nine provinces, including roughly a sixth of the seats in the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape.) This should increase the pressure on the ANC to show voters that it cares about them, because this opposition, unlike earlier rivals, competes for the ANC's own vote pool.

This change may yet prove to be the most important product of the election and the events preceding it. If COPE manages to survive—it has been plagued by internal problems but has enough seats nationally and provincially to make it a going concern—a new dynamic making for more vigorous democracy seems likely, as the votes of the vast majority of the electorate will be subject to contest.

The effect may not be immediate, especially if the ANC interprets voter loyalty in the face of all the pre-ballot warnings of disaffection as a mandate to continue business as usual. Such an interpretation would, of course, ignore the extent to which many ANC voters supported the party in spite of its governing style. Moreover, if the ANC believes that it will always win no matter what, it would probably see little reason to resolve its internal divisions. If the party follows this path, government will remain far less accountable than citizens want, but the result may be new splinter parties and more voter support for ruling-party rivals. The ANC could, however, choose to take this poll as a message to mend its internal fissures and reconnect with its voters. Citizens would then enjoy better government, and the ANC would prolong its appeal to the electorate.

There is evidence that the latter interpretation enjoys some support

within the ANC leadership. While Mbeki's stock response to government failure was to centralize and insulate the regime from the criticism, the current leadership seems at least somewhat aware that it cannot get government to work unless it is more accountable. During the campaign, Zuma stressed citizens' role in holding officials to account and promised mechanisms making it easier to voice dissatisfaction with government officials and politicians who are not providing adequate public service.¹⁵ Thus far, the only concrete attempt to implement the promise has been the creation of a "hotline" that people can call to lodge complaints (which will obviously be accessible only to those who have telephones). The mere acknowledgement, however, that government has a duty to report and respond to citizens is in itself important.

The change in leadership may also augur well for a foreign policy that supports human rights. During its tenure on the UN Security Council, South Africa protected the Burmese junta, but the new government has called for the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.¹⁶ While South Africa continues to support Zimbabwe's unity government, it now presents this as a strategic path to democracy and no longer defends Robert Mugabe. The 2009 elections may not have produced a dramatic or swift shift to deeper democracy, but it may have set in motion trends that will yield more democracy in the future, and thus may well prove a watershed in the country's democratic development.

Breaks in the political logjam are essential if democracy is to advance. But, while a more fluid politics opens opportunities, it also creates threats. There is no guarantee that the new government will continue to respect the constitution. The institutions that could be imperiled in this case are the judiciary, the media and, perhaps, the academy.

Zuma's legal problems, which were made to dissolve just days before the election, have triggered tension between ANC leaders and judges. The party seemed to regard kindness to Zuma as the sole test of whether the courts were executing their constitutional mandate: Judges were accused of being "counterrevolutionary" or hostile to democracy if they were hostile to Zuma.¹⁷

Immediately after national prosecutors withdrew charges against Zuma, Blade Nzimande, minister of higher education and South African Communist Party (SACP) general secretary, insisted on action to reform the judiciary. Although he claimed to support measures that would strengthen judicial independence, South Africa has a long history of politicians professing to extend freedoms when they plan the opposite—for example, universities were, under apartheid, strictly segregated by the Extension of University Education Act—and critics feared that Nzimande's goal was instead to control the courts. When Zuma used the same language in his State of the Nation address some weeks after the election, anxiety among ANC critics rose further.

Moreover, it is possible to undermine checks on government without

changing the constitution, simply by appointing the right people to key posts. The chief justice and several Constitutional Court judges are due for mandatory retirement soon, and the government's choice of replacements will be an obvious indicator of its intentions. For example, some in the new leadership dislike Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke because he delivered a speech promising to rein in ANC politicians who were not acting constitutionally.¹⁸ If he is appointed chief justice, there will be reason for confidence that judicial independence will be respected. Should someone else take the position—particularly if it is someone close to Zuma—anxiety will mount.

For some time, the ANC has been calling for a media tribunal. ANC leaders, including Zuma, have grouched about what they see as the public's limited ability to seek redress from newspapers that treat the public unfairly. Academic independence may be threatened if the University of South Africa caves in to demands by ANC-aligned youth organizations that the head of the school, Barney Pityana, be removed. These groups claim that calls for Pityana's removal stem from administrative issues and have nothing to do with his being a prominent member of COPE, but the coincidence is too great to be credible.

It remains to be seen whether these threats are serious—whether there is an ANC consensus on its approach to the judiciary, the media, and the academy, and what the party's intentions are. There are signs that the threat has been exaggerated: Concerns about the media seem to have translated into a plan to enhance ANC communication with the Fourth Estate. And Nzimande, the minister most likely to press the university to fire Pityana, has told him on behalf of the government that his job is safe. The animus against these bodies is not ideological but rather a reaction to institutions perceived as unsympathetic to Zuma. Support for Zuma among the new leaders is anything but unanimous, however, which may lessen the likelihood of new controls. Ultimately, the outcome will depend on debate among the leadership and the nature of the public's reaction.

The Economic Crisis and Accountable Government

South Africa has not been immune to the global economic downturn. While the major banks operate without state backing, the country has been affected by declines in investment and exports and is experiencing its first recession in seventeen years.¹⁹ Because Zuma's election was supported by the ANC's leftwing allies, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the SACP, the change in leadership was watched with some anxiety by the business community.

Expectations or fears of a shift leftward were always exaggerated, but they have also been rendered far less relevant by the economic crisis.²⁰ Like other market economies, South Africa must adjust to current realities by expanding fiscal policy to take up the slack of declining public

investment. The more active role for the public sector sought by the left is now the subject of a consensus supported even by business. A task force of business, labor, and other key private actors has recommended actions designed to address the crisis. Thus the issue now is not whether the government will intervene—all key interests agree that it must—but whether it will do so effectively.

During the past few years, the government often has been ineffective. Changed economic circumstances mean that it needs to perform much better over the next few. To this end, technical expertise is important, but the chief requirement is greater government accountability. Without demands to account for its actions, government is unlikely to seek out the needed technical competencies. Likewise, if the government is to make any strides in terms of poverty reduction, it must begin to report and respond to the needs and concerns of the poor themselves. That was not the case under Mbeki, and the government's aloofness proved to be an enormous hindrance to any progress on this front.²¹

Zuma, knowing that his administration will be judged in part by its ability to protect citizens from economic hardship, signaled in his acceptance speech that addressing the economic crisis would be his priority.

The election—and how the ANC chooses to respond to it—will potentially have great bearing on the prospects for more accountable government. Thus far, the ANC's response has been mixed, but it is more open to taking citizens seriously than the Mbeki administration. The planning commission and monitoring ministry may be inappropriate approaches, but are born of a recognition that voters want better government service. Zuma, knowing that his administration will be judged in part by its ability to protect citizens from economic hardship, signaled in his acceptance speech that addressing the economic crisis would be his priority.²²

Nevertheless, it is too early to predict that the 2009 election will compel the government to rise to the challenge of providing the services that citizens need and want. In addition to other divisions within the ANC leadership, some in the new government are former Mbeki supporters, adding to the diversity. The next election for party president will be in 2012, and Zuma has said that he does not want a second term. Some press reports have claimed that the battle to succeed him has already begun and is stirring even more infighting among ANC leaders. COSATU, meanwhile, has claimed that Zuma does in fact want another term; if true, this would sharply reduce the incentives for further internecine squabbles. But should Zuma definitively bow out of the 2012 race, they would surely flare again.

These matters of internal party politics have potential consequences

beyond the ANC. If party leaders are too absorbed with power struggles to address national priorities, divisions within the new government could stymie effective governance. The danger is that a great deal of attention will be paid to the concerns of politicians, but little or none to those of citizens. The Zuma cabinet is the biggest in the country's democratic history because of the need to accommodate many factions and individuals to prevent conflict in the party. This inclusive approach could make for more productive government by reducing resistance to official plans. It could, however, also mean that government is being structured to ensure that politicians are catered to at the expense of voters.

Most likely, the next five years will see an uneven combination of greater accountability mixed with continued concern for politicians over voters—real politics is usually more messy and uneven than the neat explanations of commentators would suggest. Inevitably, different ANC leaders will interpret the mandate conferred by the election differently, adding to the unevenness. What does seem clear, however, is that, in light of the economic crisis, effectual government performance will be the key issue of Zuma's presidency. In the end, South Africa's ability to weather the storm will depend in part on whether governing-party politicians take the election result as a cause for self-congratulation or as a warning.

NOTES

1. Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Towards a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2 (April 1970): 337–64.

2. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

3. One exception has been harsh police treatment of grassroots protest movements, which, while not ordered by the government, has not been prevented by it. See "Bishop Rubin Phillip's UnFreedom Day Speech," 27 April 2008; available at <http://antieviction.org.za/2008/04/30/bishop-rubin-phillips-unfreedom-day-speech>.

4. Steven Friedman, "Who We Are: Voter Participation, Rationality and the 1999 Election," *Politikon* 26 (November 1999): 213–24.

5. Steven Friedman, "Voice for Some: South Africa's Ten Years of Democracy," in Jessica Piombo and Lia Nijzink, eds., *Electoral Politics in South Africa: Assessing the First Democratic Decade* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3–22.

6. According to Minister of Finance Trevor A. Manuel, at the turn of this century, the government was allocating 57 percent of its spending to the poorest 40 percent of the population, and under 9 percent to the wealthiest 20 percent. Budget speech, 23 February 2000; available at www.finance.gov.za.

7. Steven Friedman, "South Africa: Globalization and the Politics of Redistribution," in Joseph S. Tulchin and Gary Bland, eds., *Getting Globalization Right: The Dilemmas of Inequality* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 11–49.

8. "Let's Pretend to Consult," *City Press*, 2 August 2008; available at http://jv.news24.com/City_Press/Features/0,,186-1696_2368908,00.html.

9. Nthambeleni Gabara, "Voters' Roll Grows to 23-Million," *South Africa Info*, 11 February 2009; available at www.southafrica.info/about/democracy/elections-110209.htm.

10. Adam Habib, "Election Analysis: South Africa's 2009 Elections," *The Thinker*, May 2009, 12–14.

11. Election Monitoring Network, press statement, 20 April 2009; available at www.idasa.org.za/index.asp?page=programme_details.asp%3FRID%3D75.

12. "AEC Members Tear Gassed, Beaten and Arrested; Residents Lay Blame on ANC," Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, Gugulethu AEC Press Update, 9 February 2009; available at <http://antieviction.org.za/2009/02/09/aec-members-tear-gassed-beaten-and-arrested-residents-lay-blame-on-anc>.

13. People classified as "coloured" under apartheid were of mixed race, Malay, or a residual category for those who were neither white, black African, nor Indian.

14. See, for example, *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 26 April 2009.

15. Amy Musgrave, "South Africa: Zuma Appeals for Joint Effort to Fix Hurdles," *Business Day* (Johannesburg), 20 April 2009.

16. "South Africa Calls for the Immediate Release of Aung San Suu Kyi," *Weekly Mail* (Cape Town), 22 May 2009; available at www.mg.co.za/article/2009-05-22-sa-calls-for-immediate-release-of-aung-san-suu-kyi.

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18. "ANC Does About-Turn Over Moseneke Comments," *Mail and Guardian Online*, 17 January 2008; available at www.mg.co.za/article/2008-01-17-anc-does-aboutturn-over-moseneke-comments.

19. Mariam Isa, "Shrinking Factory Output Points to Rates Cut," *Business Day*, 13 May 2009.

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21. Steven Friedman, "South Africa: Globalization and the Politics of Redistribution."

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